

Oral history with 89 year old white male, Mesa County, Colorado (Transcription)

Transcription for Date: July 7, 1977 and July 18, 1977 Place: Grand Junction, Colorado
Interviewer: Jean Pare

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J. <Pare?> <gap> came to the Grand Valley area in 1911 from Holland, as a young man knowing no English. Before many years, he became a fruit grower and farmer, married and raised five daughters. The following is his account of his arrival in this country and his experiences with his orchards and farm.

Speaker: In 1910, two of my friends come to America. I saw them off on the boat in Rotterdam and they agreed to write to me and tell me how things was here and, if things was to suit them, they would help me to come over. So, a year later, in April, I got started myself, because my friends wrote me that they had a good job -- thirty dollars a month and their board and room, which I figured was very good because a dollar American money meant two dollars and thirty-seven cents of Holland money. So I naturally thought of a dollar as two dollars and thirty-seven cents. So I came over. I came all the way (ten thousand miles) to get a job, thirty dollars a month and board and room. So I boarded the Nordam -- that was the name of the ship that I come over on -- and there was eleven hundred passengers aboard. Most of them was Dutch people. There was some from other countries like Switzerland and some France and some German and a lot of Russian Jews come over at that time. And they was down in the hold, underneath, and I remember well when they came aboard. It was very strange to them, seemed like, and they came

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through the door way down below there and the man, standing by the door, he had to hit the person in the chest and on his neck and bend them over, so they wouldn't bump their head. And some of them came with a gunny sack on their back with some belongings in; some with some belongings wrapped up in an old sheet; and some even had a coffee can tied to them what they was dragging along. They had to leave Russia in a hurry because the Czar was apparently prosecuting the Jews. They had to get out, so they just came out

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(N.S.) any old way. Well, it took me ten days to come across the ocean. When I came to New York, you had to be examined and all, in order to get into the United States and you had to have at least twenty-five dollars in your pocket so that you wouldn't be dependent on the country in that way. Well, I had that. In fact, I had thirty-five dollars. That's all I had when I came to the country. So, from New York, I came in an immigrant train to Chicago. and it seemed like they just dumped us out in the middle of the city. I know the whole trainload was standing on the sidewalk there and the street was cobblestones and there was a lot of little one-horse coaches what took up the passengers. They looked at your ticket and put your belongings on top of the cab and took you to a railroad station some place. Well, it seemed like that I was the only one in the whole trainload that came as far west as Grand Junction. Most people went to Grand Rapids and some to different cities in Michigan and some of them went to South Dakota what I remember, but anyway, everybody was gone and I was there alone. I stood there, all alone, but that didn't bother me. I was just a young man and I knew I'd get somewhere sometime. Well, after while one of those carts come back on the dead run -- one horse, you know, pulling over the cobblestones, just on the dead run -- and he twisted around and backed up and all, and he come out and looked at my ticket and -- he was drunk. He couldn't walk straight. Anyway, he slung my suitcase on top and pushed me into the cab. He got to his seat and tore out of there on the dead run, up one street and down the other, and finally, we come to

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a place and he took my suitcase off and set it down by a post there, opened the door and I come out and there was no railroad station. It was really just a big building with a hallway in there. It was kind of dark in there and I heard trains a'rumbling, you know, and whistling, but there was nothing inside. It was kind of dark in there and I got under there and I set down on a bench. I noticed some people in a corner, going in and out of a door, so I thought I'd go see what was going on. I went in there and there was some

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(N.S.) people sitting, up at the counter and some was laying on a couch smoking a pipe, and it didn't smell very good and I didn't know what was going on, but I knew it was no place for me. After while, I decided it was an opium den. So, I went out and went back to my bench and I got a little bit -- you know -- accustomed to the light and I found a big stairway going upstairs and I saw some people going up -- way up there. So I thought I'd better go up and see what was going on upstairs. And when I got to the top there was the railroad depot. Trains coming in and going out all the time. So I thought I'd get somewhere, so I went to the man what was there at the gate. There was a wrought-iron fence there and a gate you had to go through and you didn't get through there without the man looking at your ticket. So the man looked at my ticket and just pushed me back and shook his head. Pretty soon, another train come steaming in and I was at the gate, showing the man my ticket. He shook his head and pushed me back. And every few minutes a train come in and I was at the gate. He got tired of it, I guess, and so there was one of those wooden railroad clocks haning there on the wall inside and he had a little cane, and he pointed at the clock, tapped me on the shoulder so I'd pay attention and I told him "Yes," and he went, with his little cane, around and he held up one finger as to say "one hour." And he went around again, and he held up two fingers, "two hours", and I understood. He just took the cane and went around and around and held up ten fingers. And then he pointed to the colck and pointed to my ticket and then he motioned to me that I could go through

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the gate, so I knew I had ten hours. So I checked in my suitcase and went downstairs and went to look around a little bit, 'cause you know I couldn't go out unless ten hours expired. I went to look around a bit, you know. I didn't get to see much of Chicago because I didn't dare get away from the place very far. But anyway, I got to a place where I could get a glass of beer. When ten hours was over, I was right there at the gate, you know, and it was a different man by that time. I showed him my ticket and there was two trains ready to go, so he just motioned to one and motioned to the other for me to go through, so I could take either one, see. Well, one of them went to Denver and the other went

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(N.S.) to Pueblo. I took the one to Pueblo. I didn't know where I was going but, you know, I just took one train.

J.P. That was before they had the Moffat Tunnel, so you would have had to go through Pueblo.

N.S. Yeah. And, of course, I had the same thing over in Pueblo. I had to wait ten hours before I could make connections. Well, I got hold of a railroad map and when I finally got on the train, you know, along the railroad -- you know, where the railroad goes -- there are all kinds of little cities or towns or something like that. I figured, you know, that the train would stop at every place and then I'd know just when I was going to come to Grand Junction. So I started to mark off, every time they stopped, but they didn't stop everywhere, so when the man, the conductor, came through the train and called "Grand Junction", that was a surprise. I wasn't ready. (laughs) You know it was the fifth of May when I got here and it was hot. And I was wearing clothes , you know, like what they wore in Holland -- quite heavy -- and I was miserable. I had my collar off and my shirt open, so I had to dress in a hurry to get out! Now the boys had written to me, "When you get

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to Grand Junction, you walk right through the depot and, if you see a car standing there on the track, just hop on and we already paid your fee." There was an Interurban running then. "We've already paid your fee and told the conductor where to put you off." It was four miles on this side of Fruita where I was supposed to go to work. There was already a job waiting for me. So I walked through the depot and there was a little car, standing on the track, and I thought I was in luck. There was a car and I hopped right in. But you know I didn't know the difference between a city car and an Interurban. It was one of those little city babies, so I hopped right on. (laughs) There was just one man running it. He was the conductor and motorman and everything. I had a big suitcase with me. Well, I thought I was fixed, you know, to goto Fruita. He come to me and he talked to me. I didn't understand; I didn't Know a word of English. So I said to him, "Fruita." It's the same thing. It's spelled the same and pronounced the same here. And he shook his head and motioned for me to

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(N.S.) get off. I shook my head since I wasn't going off. I was going to Fruita. Well, he thought and thought and he saw he couldn't do nothing with me, so he went to his little seat up in front. He was studying what to do with me, I guess. Pretty soon, he come back and started to talk to me and I told him "Fruita", and he rattled off a lot of English and stamped his feet and motioned for me to get off. I told him "no." I wasn't going to get off. I was going to go to Fruita. So, he went back again and in a little bit he come back and just walked through the aisle, like, and when he got to me, he grabbed my suitcase and run with it. (Laughs) It was time for him to go. And, well, when he grabbed my suitcase, well I went, too. He set it over there on the sidewalk. By the time I got there, he was on the way back to his car and he started up his car and went his way. And I thought this was a heck of a country; wouldn't even let a man go to Fruita. (Laughs.) Pretty soon a little girl come along. (I wasn't worried, only it was so bloomin' hot. I got into Grand Junction about

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11:30 and it was hot) The little girl came along and she gave me a card with -- well, I could see all right that it Was from a restaurant, meals and so forth and so on, so I just gave it back to her. I just sat down on my suitcase and thought something would happen. I was in Grand Junction, anyway. After a little while there come a man with a dinner bucket and he looked at my suitcase. It was a big, foreign suitcase and it still had them steamship placards on it. He looked at the suitcase and went by. Then he looked back and he come back and said something I couldn't understand. I had a couple of cards in my pocket with addresses on, of a couple of people what lived in town here, so I give him one of the cards. He studied it a little bit and he motioned for me to come on. And it was only a couple blocks, down South Avenue. He opened the gate, knocked on the door. A man come to the door and he said something to him and the man started to talk Dutch to me. That was quite a relief! (Laughs) So, they called the boys. I was supposed to go four miles on this side of Fruita -- right there about where the Hunter Schoolhouse was then, just a half mile north of the Hunter Schoolhouse. It was on a Saturday, so the boys come to town that night and

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(N.S.) picked me up and I went home. Got home there about twelve thirty that night and Sunday morning I went to work. I didn't lose any time. I went to work holding spray nozzles. Went to work on a place there. There was one hundred sixty acres there and forty acres was in apple orchard. It belonged to a company, consisting of <gap> of Colorado Springs; <gap> of Grand Junction; and <gap> of Grand Junction. They were the three men what formed the company. And I worked there that summer, and I worked there that winter and the next summer and then they sold out and then I lost my job and I had to come to Grand Junction. Grand Junction at that time -- well, Main Street had a concrete

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sidewalk from Fourth, I think, to Sixth. The rest of the town was wooden sidewalks. Main Street was settled, of course, and to the north --- well, it was pretty settled to the south, but north of Main Street -- Rood Avenue was fairly well settled, but from there on, it was just a house here and there and half of them was empty. And a lot of sagebrush growing there, just wild. And North Avenue -- there was a barbed wire fence on the north side of North Avenue (what is now North Avenue) and where the college is, it was just open ground and sagebrush growing there. There was a road right catty-cornered through there. I went through there -- finally I got married and was farming for my own -- I went through there with tomato wagons. Back and forth to haul tomatoes to the Curry Canning Company, and later that was KurerEmpson.

J.P. What year were you married?

N.S. I was married in 1918. No, that was when I moved over here. I was married in 1914. And I farmed over there by Fruita, by the Star School house there, and there was a lot of apples there then, too.

J.P. Didn't they have part of that called Appleton out there?

N.s. Yeah, that was between where I lived and Grand Junction. Then I moved over here and rented a place from <gap> place over here a half a mile east from where I live now. In 1920, I bought this place. There were lots of apples here then, you know, and I had an apple orchard like that, myself. And I've been inter.

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(N.S.) ested in fruit ever since. I still have some fruit trees.

J.P. What happened to the apples?

N.S. Well, what happened to the apple industry, to my idea of it, --- you know we had trouble with the coddling moth. That is the moth what produces the apple worms. And I know -- I remember when I worked for the company yet down in Fruita, we sprayed eight times during the summer time and we still had twenty percent worms. And then it went on from there and then, after I bought the place here myself, I had three acres in apple orchard and I sold my crop to a man from Kansas City. And then, the order came in that the apples had to be wiped. There was too much arsenical residue on the apples, so that it was not permissible to ship them out. So, we started to wipe them a little bit. What I did: I had an angora goat skin and I put it on the sorting table and I provided the sorters with cotton gloves and they rubbed them over that goat skin and that took most of the residue off into the gloves and onto the goat skin. And I would take the skin off every now and then and shake it out good and give them fresh gloves. That way I got by but from there on, it got worse and worse. Then, they made, you know, wiping machines. They were made here in town and they weren't good enough, either. They got by with that for a year or so and then they had to be washed. Well, then we washed the anples and the pears, too. And that didn't do the job. So, then the water had to be hot and, besides, we had to put some sort of acid into the water to eat the residue off the apples before we could ship them out. And to my idea, that's what spoiled the apple industry in Mesa County.

J.P. That got to be quite an expense, didn't it?

N.S. It was expensive and, besides, we lost our markets because the apples they lost their keeping quality. An apple has a natural preservative on the outside. Whenever you take

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that off -- the acid and the hot water took it all off. Besides, if there was a little bruise or a little opening, some of that acid penetrated into the apples -- why they started to decay right away. So what happened to the apple industry, why they just went. Couldn't raise them anymore because the people wouldn't come in here and buy it -- buy the fruit -- because, you know,

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(N.S.) it had no keeping quality. So then I planted peaches

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and then the Board of Control come in and you couldn't ship out anything unless it was two and an eighth inches. If your fruit was below that, well you couldn't ship it out. So -- it happened so that one year I had a nice crop of fruit. Very good fruit, but it didn't quite make the (regulations size).